

Dragonshards

The Kobolds of Khorvaire

By Keith Baker



The black-scaled sorcerer barked a harsh Draconic syllable and a wave of invisible force slammed Daine against the wall, pinning him against the rough stone. His captor sneered, needle teeth flashing.

"Thinking to walk the deep tunnels alone and unseen," the kobold sneered. "Khyber whispers and warns, and so you are found. Dead now, by his hand."

Daine gasped in pain as the mystical bonds grew tighter, squeezing the breath from his lungs

The kobolds of Khorvaire trace their history to the dawn of Eberron. According to ancient legend, kobolds were formed from the drops of blood shed in the battle between Eberron, Siberys, and Khyber. A new generation of dragons descended from Siberys, Khyber brought forth fiends and horrors, and Eberron gave birth to the creatures of nature -- but the kobolds were already there, spawned from the first battle. True or not, this myth is the driving force behind kobold psychology and culture.

Two subraces of kobold exist in Khorvaire: the iredar (Draconic for "ones of earth"), who trace their ancestry to Eberron, and the irvhir (Draconic for "ones below") that descend from Khyber. These two races share a common appearance, but each race has a distinctive body odor that kobolds can instantly detect; in fact, a kobold can automatically identify the subrace of any other kobold within 15 feet. A character with long experience with kobolds can distinguish these scents by making a successful DC 20 Wisdom check; if the creature possesses the scent ability, the DC of this check is reduced to 10. Kobolds find the scent of others of their kind to be soothing, and kobolds that spend long periods of time away from their own kind often become depressed.

Beyond scent, the key distinction between the kobold subraces is supernatural. Kobolds produce a surprising number of sorcerers, which is a phenomenon they attribute to their supposed bond to the progenitor dragons. Irvhir sorcerers typically possess spells tied to corruption and darkness, while iredar sorcerers usually have powers of defense and binding. This is not an absolute rule, and a kobold PC can take any spell that she desires. However, an iredar kobold that makes use of spells such as *fear*, *darkness*, or *chilling touch* may be viewed with suspicion by her companions, who see these as the powers of the Dragon Below.

Stories are told of a third subrace of kobolds: the irsvern (Draconic for "ones above"), children of Siberys. According to legend, these kobolds have wings and live in hidden communities on the peaks of the tallest mountains. In 867 YK, Tolas Koln of the Wayfinder Foundation set out to recover a copy of the *Talarash Siberys* said to reside in an abandoned draconic temple in the Ironroot Mountains, and the last entry in the expedition journal describes an encounter with winged kobolds with astonishing sorcerous powers. Some say that this is a documented encounter with the irsvern kobolds, while others dismiss it as a hoax perpetrated by Koln himself.

Outsiders often assume that kobolds are primitive and savage since they live in unmodified caverns and rely on oral tradition instead of written records. Also, they live in small tribal communities and have never come together to create cities, nations, or empires. However, kobolds are just as sophisticated as humans or gnomes. While they prefer to live in natural environments instead of creating artificial structures, kobolds have a great gift for

mining and stoneworking, and they often fill their lairs with cunning traps. But their culture is driven by tradition, and the kobolds have never sought to change or progress. They are the children of the dragons, vessels of the progenitors' will; change will come when the great dragons mandate it.

Lands: To date, kobold communities have been encountered in Q'barra and in the Seawall Mountains between Darguun and Zilargo. However, kobolds are extremely reclusive, and recent events suggest that kobold communities are hidden across Khorvaire.

Settlements: The kobolds of Eberron prefer to live in natural caverns. The irvhir kobolds make their homes deep beneath the surface, while the iredar kobolds usually live in mountain caves. The kobolds believe that these caverns are the veins of the progenitor dragons, and they often carve elaborate draconic designs on the walls. Kobolds prefer to live in tribes containing approximately 100 adults. The largest communities can have up to 600 adults. Generally, though, a community splits once its population rises too far above 100 adults, with younger kobolds moving away to found a new community.

Kobolds bond with horrid animals. Horrid creatures -- especially burrowing animals such as rats, weasels, and badgers -- are frequently found in kobold communities.

Power Groups: Kobold culture revolves around three forces. The stonescales (or ternmolik, in Draconic) perform the day-to-day tasks required for the survival of a community: crafts, agriculture, and the gathering of food when agriculture will not suffice. The claws (gix) are soldiers and hunters. And the blood seers (iejirastrix) are mystics who hear the voices of the progenitor dragons -- sorcerers, druids, and favored souls whose magical powers are seen as proof of the kobolds' divine ancestry.

Typically the chieftain of a village is an old claw, though in a peaceful region a stonescale can hold the post. The chieftain manages the daily affairs of the community while the blood seers link the communities together. Seers often travel from village to village to meet with other blood seers, discussing their visions and issues affecting the race as a whole.

One other force that has an impact on kobold culture: the Chamber. While most dragons dismiss the kobold's claims of draconic ancestry, kobold blood seers can have strange (though often distorted) insights into the Draconic Prophecy, and the Chamber occasionally makes use of kobold agents. This can result in teams of kobolds equipped with powerful magic weapons and items -- an unpleasant surprise for a group of adventurers that underestimates the little reptiles.

Beliefs: Mainstream kobold culture is oriented around the worship of a particular progenitor dragon. The irvhir tradition is one of the oldest cults of the Dragon Below, though it has no connection with the aberration-oriented cults of the Shadow Marches. The iredar kobolds revere Eberron as the source of life and nature; this is a unique druidic tradition with no ties to the sects of the Eldeen Reaches.

The kobolds see themselves as the hands of the progenitors in the modern age. And in the past, visions of the blood seers have often been tied to the Draconic Prophecy. It is a mystery, since the kobolds themselves rarely understand the significance of their actions -- but even the Chamber respects this uncanny gift.

Of course, not all kobolds are bound to these beliefs. A few tribes have split off from these traditions, ignoring the words of the blood seers. Irvhir kobolds often turn to the worship of the Shadow or the Mockery, while independent iredar revere Boldrei and Olladra.

Language: Kobolds speak Draconic. There is no evidence of the kobolds ever having possessed another language or having been taught by dragons. Most kobolds love to talk, and a meal with a group of kobolds is a deluge of yapping voices.

Relations: Most kobolds prefer to avoid contact with the outside world. Irvhir kobolds are especially xenophobic, and the miners of Zilargo have been fighting irvhir kobolds for centuries. Iredar kobolds are more moderate in their views. They have little interest in foreign cultures and fight irvhir kobolds as often as they battle gnomes or humans.

In the wake of the Last War, kobolds have had more active presence on the surface of Khorvaire. Kobold scavengers often rummage through battlefields and ruined villages. Previously unknown irvhir communities have risen from the depths to strike at weakened thorps and hamlets along the borders of the Mournland. Whether these are random attacks of opportunity or driven by the seers of Khyber remains to be seen.

Classes: Kobold soldiers are typically warriors. Kobold combat techniques focus on speed as opposed to strength, and exceptional hunters are often swashbucklers, scouts, or rangers. Clerics and adepts are rare since kobolds favor druids and favored souls. The kobolds have no tradition of wizardry, but they produce a remarkable number of powerful sorcerers. While all blood seers are spellcasters, not all sorcerers become seers. But all kobold sorcerers are considered blessed by the progenitor and usually become the champions of their tribes.

Roleplaying a Khorvaire Kobold

When playing a kobold -- either as a PC or NPC -- consider a few things first. If you are alone, why have you left your tribe? Have you abandoned the beliefs of your people, or are you on a quest? Perhaps the blood seers believe you have an important destiny to fulfill -- but it requires you to live among the warm.

Kobolds recognize that they are physically weaker than most other races, and they rely on cunning to win battles. Treacherous tactics are not shameful: They are a sign of intelligence. This applies to social situations as well as combat. When dealing with non-kobolds, a kobold lies and cheats without a second thought. Your wits are your weapons: Use them!

As a kobold, balance arrogance with caution. Your people have a divine heritage that places you on an equal footing with dragons. On the other hand, divine heritage doesn't do much when you're arguing with an angry bugbear. So flaunt your superiority when you can, but know your limits!

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of **Eberron** to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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